

CHILDE HASSAM, IMPRESSIONIST

The paintings of Childe Hassam are among the most conspicuous of present-day witnesses that an artist's productions are not faithful transcripts of nature, but bits of nature viewed through a more or less disturbing medium. The painter's art is not mere photography, but photography plus individuality. The artist, to use a figure of speech which may seem trite if not hackneyed, is a lens through which the public catches glimpses of things in the new combinations, the unusual lights, the unique perspectives, resulting from an individual bent of mind; and, to carry the figure farther, upon the clarity, the texture, the convexity, or concavity of the lens depends the worth of the pictures.

Viewed through the eyes of one artist, a given scene or object becomes invested with dignity and meaning, while through the eyes of another the same scene or object is robbed of thought and character. Seen with

the aid of one interpreter, it has the witchery of line and color, and with the aid of another it seems paltry, dead, devoid of interest. The scene or object is the same: it is the lens that exalts or debases, magnifies or belittles, suffuses with charm or robs of beauty. The individual element is that which stamps a work with value.

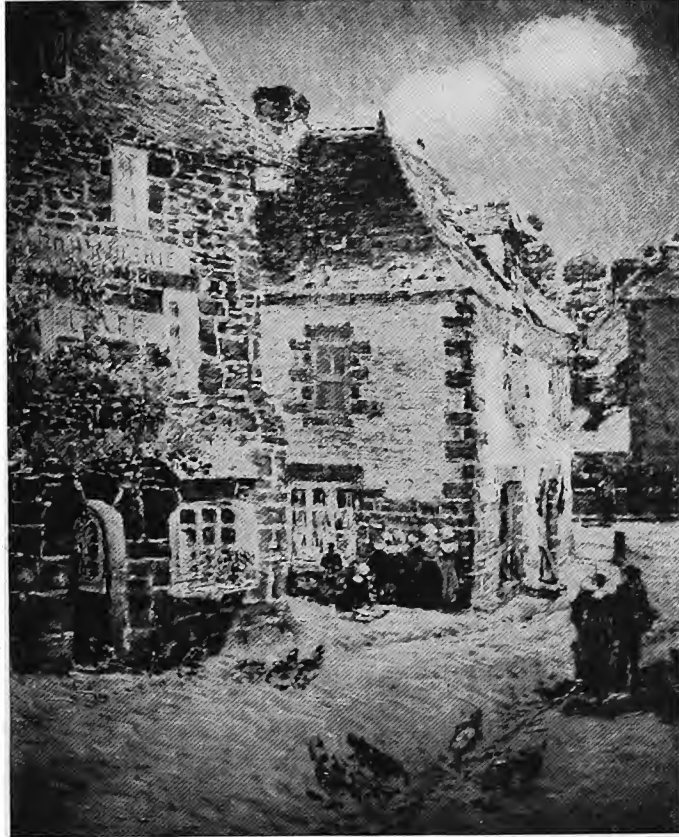
Hassam is impressionistic, after his own fashion idealistic, at times even robust in his sturdy, matter-of-fact treatment. But, whatever his theme or his method, he is strictly individual. He might paint—and his range of subjects is not limited—an odd bit of Brittany architecture or a sleepy nook in Provincetown, a Parisian boulevard or Broadway in New York, the Grand Canal in Venice or the Chicago



DRAWING
By Childe Hassam

Drainage Canal, and however the finished products might differ in other respects, they would all agree in this, that they were Hassam's.

This is not saying that he essays uniqueness, or that he seeks to make capital out of odd selections of subjects or unusual color schemes. He does not. Things impress him in a peculiar way, and he simply



MIDDAY, PONT AVEN
By Childe Hassam

seeks to record his impressions. He recognizes clearly that there is no such thing as absolute realism, and while he tempers the impressions he records on his canvases, and avoids running to the excesses to which some of his fellow-impressionists have been led, he is yet self-reliant and independent enough to paint the world as he sees it, and leave his critics to determine whether his color schemes fit his subjects, and whether his finished works are "according to the masters."

To Hassam the average picture painted for salons and salesrooms is a "Christmas Card," not art. He sees more beauty, more art, in a simple scene daintily dressed in delicate color than in a pretentious composition in which the color possibilities of the palette have been exhausted; and he dreams, though occasionally perhaps despairingly,



IMPROVISATION
By Childe Hassam

of the day when the picture-buying public will have been converted to his views.

“I am often asked,” said he recently to the writer, “what determines my selection of subjects, what makes me lean toward impressionism. I do not know. I can only paint as I do and be myself, and I would rather be myself and work out my ideas, my vagaries, if you please, in color, than turn out Christmas cards and have to hire a clerk to attend to orders. I am often asked why I paint with a low-toned, delicate palette. Again I cannot tell. Subjects suggest to me a color scheme and I just paint. Somebody else might see a riot



PEN DRAWING
By Childe Hassam

limitation. Indeed, if asked if he were a realist he would probably say yes—from his standpoint. And he would be right.

"When once the artist has summed up in himself the memories of his apprenticeship, the acquired memories of others, and his own—derived from them, perhaps, but at any rate added to them—you can try him with the following experiment," says that veteran teacher John La Farge. "Take him to ten different places; set him before ten different scenes; ask him to copy what he sees before him. I say to copy so as to make our task of finding him out more easy. All of these so-called copies, which

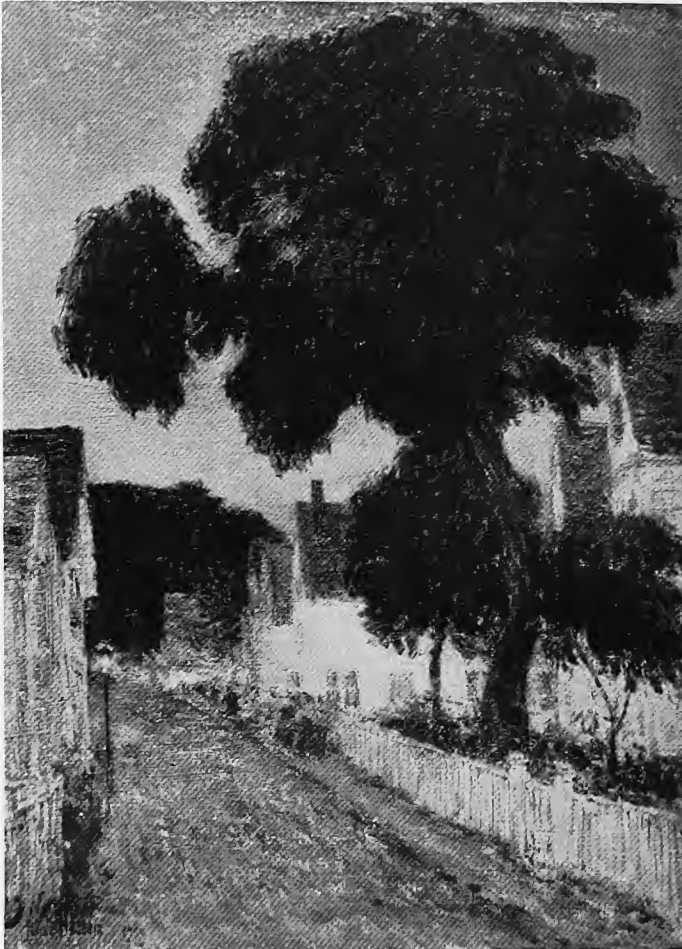
of color where I see only whites or drabs and buffs. If so, he wouldn't be loyal to himself if he didn't paint the riot, and I wouldn't be true to myself if I did."

To Hassam, therefore, the painter who claims allegiance to a school is a witness of arrested development. On the other hand, the painter who sees for himself and works on his own lines, though he may struggle with the unpopular few, is the artist most worthy of respect and encouragement. He takes no glory in being called an impressionist, nor does he regard it as a reproach or as an indication of personal



DRAWING
By Childe Hassam

are really representations, will be stamped in some peculiar way, more or less interesting, according to the value of our artist. And you will recognize at once that they are really ten *copies of his manner of looking at* the thing he copies.



A VILLAGE STREET
By Childe Hassam

“Suppose again that you could persuade ten different artists—I am speaking of craftsmen, that is to say, of people who have already the use of the tools of their trade—ask, persuade these ten men to copy, as I have called it, the same subject in nature, the same landscape; and you will have ten different landscapes, in that you would

be able to pick out each one for the way it was done. In short, any person who knew anything about it would recognize, as it were, ten different landscapes."

Hence, La Farge tells his pupils not to be afraid of the word "realism," not to be afraid of indulging the illusion that they are ren-

dering the reality of the things they look at — that they are copying or transcribing. He tells them that they will always give to nature, that is, what is outside of them, their own character. Hassam never took lessons from La Farge, but in a moment of humor might be inclined to accuse the elder artist of appropriating one of his principles.

Hassam, in his brusque way, is prone to inveigh against art schools and art teachers. He regards them as necessary evils that the student should renounce as soon as he has outgrown the swaddling-



IN BRITTANY
By Childe Hassam

clothes of his profession, and as regards himself he has been true to his principles. He was born in Boston in 1859 and was educated at the Boston public schools. He began his art studies in his native city, and like many another ambitious student, was led to go to Paris to supplement the instruction received at home. But, as he puts it, his Boston art education was preliminary and his Paris instruction was superfluous.

A short period of the latter sufficed, and whatever of ability the painter has disclosed in his work has been self-developed. He therefore betrays as little perhaps as any of the better known American

artists the influence of the masters under whose instruction he sat. Even his impressionism is Hassam's. His peculiar selection of a palette, his mosaic of paint dabs, his freshness, piquancy, spirit, are his own. Of course his favorite methods have their dangers and their limitations. But he sees beauty in what many would reject as unworthy of serious art, and his popularity and the fact that he is many times a medalist sufficiently evidence the fact that he is alert to these dangers and limitations, and knows how to avoid the one and circumvent the other.

Hassam's name is often associated with pretty bits of Brittany village and rural life, and commonplace but equally pretty scenes in and about Provincetown, where he delights to spend part of his time. Really his interests are broad and his selection of subjects diverse. He paints



THE STAIRCASE
By Childe Hassam

landscapes and seascapes, picturesque architectural nooks, interiors with up-to-date furnishings and settings. His female faces and figures are especially successful, and his metropolitan street scenes are second to none that have been produced. Indeed, he is one of the very few artists who have found beauty in the teeming busy streets of New York and have produced pictures of street scenes that have value apart from local associations. In these latter he has wisely drawn the line between mere illustrations and finished paintings, and by a process of elimination peculiarly his own, has kept out those details that go to give life and interest to an illustration but militate against a work of art.

Hassam's paintings, whatever be the subject—a village street, a cottage with a flower-dashed garden, a public square, a country



A BRITTANY COTTAGE
By Childe Hassam

church, a lady's boudoir with piano and bric-à-brac, a wind-swept or snow-piled street in the city—open up vistas of beauty that an artist less poetic in temperament and less masterful in technique would scarcely apprehend. He knows how to use high colors to good advantage, but he uses them sparingly. He prefers low tones, but his work is never dull or heavy. Even those paintings in which there is the least suggestion of a high palette scintillate with color, or perhaps one had better say with light and life. There is

a *verve*, an alertness, a palpitating life, and withal an element of the winsome in everything he does. Pronounced as are his characteristics, which at times border closely on mannerism, his pictures rarely suggest the monotony of repetition. The man, in a word, has fertility of imagination, which serves as a foil for his favorite color schemes and for his technical peculiarities.

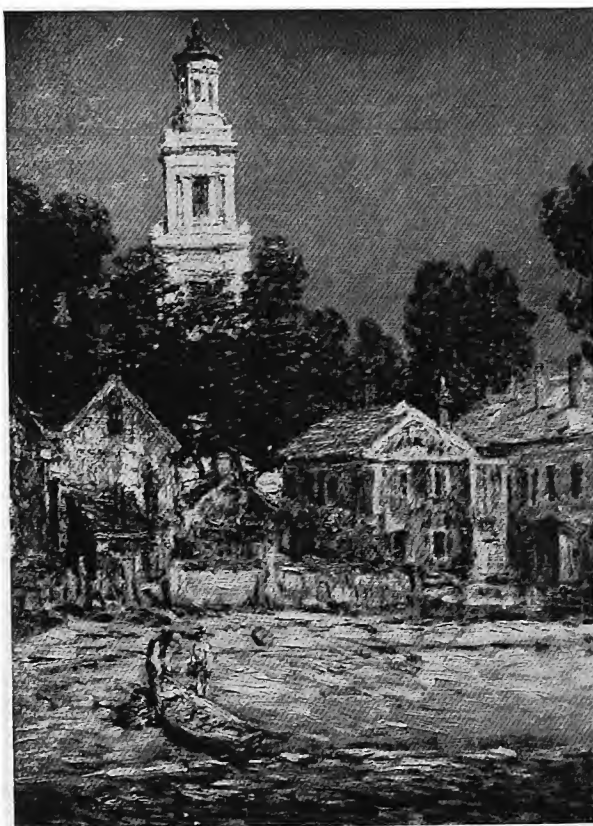
His Brittany cottages, for instance, may present a uniformity of whitish or grayish walls. But these features after all, though essential to a Hassam picture of the district depicted, are subordinate to some central thought or sentiment that is worthy of the painter's art. And so with the prosaic Provincetown scenes and the dainty interiors in which he has been so successful. One feels that the artist is a man of fine sensibilities and delicate perceptions, and that his composition, technique, and choice of colors are a natural outgrowth of his bent of mind.

Hassam has for many years regularly been represented at the leading exhibitions, and art lovers are familiar with his work. In the many canvases he has displayed, his draughtsmanship is uniformly

good. His touch is sure and unwavering, his themes are refined and attractive, and his color schemes are harmonious. He has no use for the theatrical, the grewsome, or the tragic. His pictures are more of the nature of idylls in color, and they are prized not less for their inherent grace and beauty than for their fulsome suggestion of pure wholesome life.

The paintings of Hassam are of that peculiar character that makes it difficult to do them justice in reproduction. The accompanying illustrations give but a faint suggestion of the beauty of the originals. The color schemes are too low-toned and delicate, the atmospheric effects are too subtle, the contrasts of light and shade are too indefinitely marked to make the necessary features for a good black-and-white print. In short, the moment one undertakes to transfer a Hassam picture to a printed page the delicate impressionism that constitutes one of its chief charms is lost, and all that is left is a hint of the subject and a general idea of the draughtsman-ship.

✓ Hassam has been singularly successful in competitions, and this may be taken as a fair evidence of favorable critical judgment as to his work. He won a medal at Paris in 1889 and one at Munich in 1892. In 1893 he was a medalist at Chicago, in 1894 and in 1899 at Philadelphia, and in 1899 also at Pittsburg. He won prizes of the Boston Art Club in 1890 and in 1895, of the Cleveland Art Association in 1896, and at Pittsburg in 1899. Honors sit lightly upon him, since he



THE WHITE CHURCH
By Childe Hassam

is too unpretentious in his life to be puffed up with the pride of success.

He is a close student and a hard worker and one of the most ardent champions of American art. He is a member of Ten American Painters, New York; of the Société National des Beaux Arts, Paris; of the Secession, Munich; of the American Water Color Society; and of the New York Water Color Club. His interests are strictly American, and with his habits of industry and his determination to work out his future on his own line, American art has much to expect from him.

When the eminent French actor, Coquelin, was in America recently, he bought two of Hassam's impressionistic canvases to take back with him to France, declaring at the time of purchase that the artist was the most able impressionist painter in America. The compliment was not ill-advisedly spoken, and Hassam will easily maintain the rank assigned him.

FREDERICK W. MORTON.

